(b) ©The information is as under:—

	November, 2006 to October, 2007	November, 2005 to October, 2006	November, 2004 to October, 2005
No. of Users	2100	1200	3100

(d) In view of answer to (b), the question does not arise.

Shatabdi like trains from Delhi to cities of Punjab

*138. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has plans to introduce Shatabdi like trains from Delhi to important cities of Patiala and Hoshiarpur in Punjab;

(b) if so, the the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that traffic from Delhi to Patiala and Hoshiarpur has increased during the last few years; and

(d) if so, whether any survey has been conducted on these sectors and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI LALU PRASAD): (a) No, Sir.

(c) Does not arise

(d) Yes, Sir.

(e) Census of occupancy of trains on these sectors is done twice in a year.

Import of wheat on higher rate

†*139. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has imported wheat at the rate of 325 dollar and 390 dollar per tonne instead of 263 dollar per tonne during the last few months;

(b) if not, the facts in this regard;

(c) whether Government has wrongly estimated the said procurement; and

(d) if so, the authority to whom the responsibiliy of the said estimate was given alongwith the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (d) A tender was floated by the State Trading Corporation (STC) for import of 10 lakh tons of wheat on 30th April, 2007. The STC recommended

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

purchase of 3.06 lakh tons of wheat at a weighted average price of US $ 263 per ton. However, STC advised that there were possibilities of softening of prices for arrival beyond August, 2007 as compared to the prices received in the tender for the following reasons:

(i) Fresh crop is due for harvest in July/August, 2007 in exporting countries like Russia, France, Germany, Ukraine, etc.

(ii) The Australian crop to be harvested during November/December, 2007 is reported to be good as per the IGC report of April, 2007 which may have a softening effect on wheat prices.

(iii) The prices quoted by suppliers for June/July, 2007 delivery is higher than for July/August delivery, indicating lower prices in subsequent months.

The IGC report dated 24.5.2007 showed that prices were declining from the beginning of May upto 23rd of May. Further, domestic wheat procurement was still going on and it was apprehended that import of wheat at a higher price would induce hoarding of wheat stocks in the hope of future price rise thereby adversely affecting procurement. The CBOT futures did not show any indication of spurt in prices in the near future. Therefor, the Government decided not to purchase wheat at US $ 263 per ton.

On June 11, 2007 the global estimate of wheat production was downgraded from more than 621 million tons to 610 million tons by USDA and soon after by the International Grains Council (IGC). Thereafter, the CBOT futures and spot prices of wheat started increasing in the international market. The domestic procurement was only about 110 lakh tons as against estimated requirement of 150 lakh tons of wheat required for the Central Pool. After assessing the requirements of food security and international prices of wheat, it was decided to float a tender to import one million tons of wheat. Accordingly, STC invited tenders on 26.6.2007 and recommended the purchase of 5.11 lakh tons of wheat at US $ 325.59 Per ton. The STC had taken into account all relevant information and also consulted experts in the field before making the recommendation. The ocean freight had also gone up considerably. The CBOT futures were showing a bullish trend pointing to higher prices in the international market in the coming months. Based on these, the Government decided to purchase 5.11 lakh tons of wheat at US $ 325.59 per ton.

The Government reviewed the position of buffer stocks and decided to float a tender in August for purchase of wheat. As against the buffer stock norms of 171 lakh tons on 1st July, 2007, the actual stock was 129 lakh tons. The CBOT futures were showing a bullish trend in the coming months. There were reports of major wheat producing countries placing restrictions on wheat imports. 'The tender was opened on 29.8.2007. The STC recommended pruchase of 7.95 lakh tons of wheat at a weighted average price of US $ 389.45 per ton, which was accepted by the Government.

The import of wheat was done by the Government taking into account the requirements of food security, the need for maintaining buffer stocks as per norms to meet the requirements of the Public Distribution System, Welfare Schemes, natural calamities, etc., the domestic wheat procurement, international spot and futures prices and estimates of global wheat production at the relevant time. The estimates of global production are done by International Grains Council (IGC) and US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The estimates made by them are published every month. Government of India has no independent agency for estimating global production.